

RADIO TRANSMUNDANE

Part Five

If you're already living
in a futuristic dystopian spy novel
why not be a covert operative?

220 smtp.[REDACTED].[REDACTED] ESMTTP Postfix
HELO relay.[REDACTED].[REDACTED]
250 smtp.[REDACTED].[REDACTED] okay
MAIL FROM: <peregrine@[REDACTED].[REDACTED]>
250 ok
RCPT TO: <ao121@[REDACTED].[REDACTED]>
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DATA
354 End data with <CR><LF>.<CR><LF>
From: "Agent Peregrine" <peregrine@[REDACTED].[REDACTED]>
To: Agent-Operative 121 <ao121@[REDACTED].[REDACTED]>
Date: Tue, 23 Mar 2021 01:21:00 -0000
Subject: re:Increase your POWER by 100% in 2 WEEKS GUARANTEED!

Hello [REDACTED],

Thank you for your interest in our personal enhancement product. A complimentary sample pack is on its way and will arrive shortly in an unmarked brown paper envelope. ;)

Until then why don't I catch you up on all our hijinx, starting from the point when we went underground.

So after our fade out we quietly secured funding and discretely established a comfortable Base Of Operations in a wonderfully espionage-y neighbourhood right in the heart of Central. I even have an office (LOL!) overlooking the park.

That thumb drive contained, among other things, software written by some Transmundane Software Group subsidiary calling itself IONIC Research Labs.

Deeper examination of the IRL code suggested that it does what the README file claimed it does: open-source surveillance and automated intelligence gathering -- an absolute must for the bespoke BOO.

In checking the authenticity of the software we nostalgically altered a copy and "leaked" it on the web, along with a few requisitions. About a month later we received a response in the form of a newly released sci-fi flick combining "synchronicity" and "IONIC" in the title, and which contained a nearly identical logo printed on baggies of the titular, time-warping drug. Software: legit; movie: meh.

Of course we're keeping the "extended" IRL kit strictly in-house. As one of our first projects we're hooking up a neural network component to see what happens -- with any luck Skynet will work for the Org!

Anyway, I'm chuffed as cheese to read that you were able to pick up the online debriefings we included in the "broadcast".

No one seemed to question the switch and I'm assuming no one but us had done any analyses. I agree with you that the wavelengths were a little cryptic -- as per Transmundane policy! -- but the common nomenclature, not to mention the common propagation medium, should've provided some good clues. I mean, you were able to pluck it out of thin air using just your brain!

But whatevs. I think it's clear that the intel was always intended for dissemination and recruitment so there wasn't much emphasis on hard targets, only that it should pack a punch and occur within a couple of years or so.

Dates and times popped up vaguely in the debriefings so our analyses relied mainly on primary experiential data. We didn't focus so much on observations of an event, although there are plenty of those, but more observations as an

event. This then allowed us to construct candidate dossiers (timelines, players, causes, effects), and finally apply a simple process of elimination.

We tried to keep operational "slips" to a minimum but you know how hard it can be to contain such things. I'm keeping track of these collateral incidents but so far I've found only one: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cB7YI8ja_fk

I'll circle back to that later. In the meantime, why don't I just start with the first recorded mission, "Audacious" (RT 3.8)

"I know we still have to wait for analysis but I think we hit the jackpot there."

So here we have a direct infiltration of a den of Central Corporadoes, an "ALERT" status, the stand-out yellow dress, and the "inside person" pointing toward the crucial information ... subtlety itself, yes?

Next, there's the debriefing on mission "Panopticum" (RT 3.9)

"... a serene and imperious smile on her lips, black ice in her German-Korean eyes."

Hard to miss the focus there: Korea and Germany. The "black ice" also appeared significant. And what about that bearskin rug?

A common attribute to both Korea and Germany is a divisive Communism which, when combined with the bearskin, points to an underlying and somewhat stereotypical Russian involvement.

Flimsy, sure, but then there's the nuclear power plant thing.

"... who wants to be crushed under piles of jagged concrete next to a crumbling nuclear reactor?"

Indeed, there's a nuclear reactor project in Akkuyu, Turkey (a country bordering the Black Sea), in Mersin Province (named after a locally abundant shrub with round, glossy, black fruit), quietly under management by Rosatom, Russia's state-owned nuclear power behemoth. And they recently experienced an incident on the site.

"This had all been planned ..."

The reportedly planned ("controlled") explosion and damage to surrounding environs was as described in the debriefing. The locals were, for the most part, not impressed. (<https://bianet.org/english/society/237848-houses-damaged-in-controlled-explosion-in-nuclear-power-plant-site>).

"... little blurs of black and white that occasionally resolved into the schulkleidung of frantically scrambling school children."

Really, though, it was the group of school kids in black and white uniforms that put the bow on top. Note that, "It is standard practice for Rosatom to maintain partnerships with schools in the regions of its operation."
(<https://rosatomnewsletter.com/turkey/akkuyu-goes-to-school/>)

As an "URGENT" operation "Panopticum" wasn't expected to punch much above its weight but I think that RT 3.9 produced good intel, especially considering that it was the product of the fledgling wing of "an espionage-oriented secret society", or whatever. And we haven't even gotten around to making good use of that mundane tech yet.

"GLASS ELEVATOR" (RT 3.10) is where things began to pick up.

"I didn't know what to expect but I didn't think that the blast would be, like, seismic."

We focused in on this immediately: big explosion, "seismic" blast.

"Then it was on to Dockside directly, straight through the vent work in the shaft, out through the locker and across the bridge, no pit stops or sightseeing."

"Dockside" was a clear vector, as were descriptions like "service hallways", "mechanical rooms", "lattice work", "storage lockers", "bridge", "vent work", and so on. Not a good location for "sightseeing". All arrows pointed to a commercial or industrial port, not unlike the Port of Beirut; you might remember the "accident" they had there in August of 2020?

"... we'd start from our current position at the east entrance, work our way through the food court, up the escalator, through the gauntlet, then split up taking half-ish of the security force with me and half-ish with him."

...

"The security was young and dozy, didn't notice us until it was too late. As soon as they did, we started shrieking like lunatics and ran straight at them."

There were two recorded explosions, the first being a less destructive but more flamboyant fireworks display, the second being a "seismic" blast in warehouse 12.

In the debriefing the explosion is described as being a "diversion". We haven't been able to either confirm or deny this.

However, the immature and "dozy security" appears to be accurate. From a Wikipedia entry on the Port of Beirut explosion: "Faysal Itani, a political analyst and deputy director of the Center for Global Policy at Georgetown University wrote that the Port ... suffered from 'pervasive culture of negligence, petty corruption and blame-shifting.'"

Despite the slight temporal disjoint (about a month), both the darkened, disused "food court" and the running and "shrieking lunatics" were very corroborative location vectors.

More from that Wikipedia page: "On 10 September 2020, a large fire erupted in the port area covering the skies of Beirut with toxic gas. The incident occurred in a cooking oil warehouse and food parcels belonging to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), then spread to a stock of rubber tires in the port's duty-free zone. Following black smoke rising above the city's skyline, panic broke out due to the fear of another explosion, and motivated people to flee the city ... "

The cascading events on the day of the Port of Beirut explosion have been traced back to a couple of inexperienced, incompetent, and/or careless workers who were welding shut some sort of opening or door in the vicinity.

"... that's how I made it to the double doors. The kid with me had recently become an Agent."

The "Elevator" itself might have something to do with Combi Lift, the German company that was ultimately contracted to remove the remaining hazardous materials still stored in the Port of Beirut, but this remains largely speculative.

Regardless, this operation produced some solid intel, which got even better with RT 4.2

At this point, however, we were getting fidgety thinking we may have eyes on us. Aside from RT 3.9, we had another good reason to worry.

If it wasn't obvious, the 2nd "CRITICAL" operation (RT 4.1 "TENEBRIS"), on the 22nd of June, 2020, was intentionally and knowingly compromised - a blue and yellow red herring, if you will. As I'd said, we were worried about the kinds of "slips" that might give us away (maybe "leaks" is a better word?), and our concern was justified exactly 222 days later in that clumsy attempt I linked to earlier.

That the attempt involved three bumbling parties, two of whom may have been only dimly aware of their role, was as much as a surprise as the "shocking text" in the 4.2 debriefing.

"This, precisely this, is why you never get a junior to do the job of an operative."

Clumsy.

Anyhoo, as described in the debriefing the attempt was amateurish so it was decided that security had not been compromised; further investigation into the Port of Beirut explosion could continue.

RT 4.2 ("TENEBRIS"), starts off with a direct hit.

"The ship had been some sort of decommissioned cargo or military ship ... The outside was an unapologetic construction, designed for hearty sea voyages, made to last. Looks were not up there on the original priority list."

Resold a number of times and responsible for bringing the ammonium nitrate into the Port of Beirut, the Rhosus was exactly as described: a large, old, functionally ugly cargo ship.

"This was the first land we'd seen in days and I was trying to breathe in the tropical experience from the bow when this whole maritime demolition scene unfolded in front of me."

Beirut has a tropical-like climate complete with copious palm trees, sandy beaches, hot and humid summers, and mild winters. Technically the climate is subtropical but for most A-Os I think that this would be nitpicking.

"There were lots of little refurbishments all over the otherwise industrially cold vessel. Most of them seemed to me like silly ways to flaunt a newfound wealth ..."

The owner of the Rhosus at the time it docked at the Port of Beirut, one Igor Grechushkin, was an ostensibly nouveau riche Russian businessman with next to no experience in shipping.

The debriefing went on to provide a slightly deeper profile of Grechushkin.

"I suppose that the guy had been gracious enough to take me aboard his ship after buying my so-unbelievable-it-has-to-be-true cock and bull story back at that Dockside bar. But even then I detected the ostentatious odour of douchebag about him, a stink that only increased over time."

At the time that the cargo ship Rhosus was in Beirut, Grechushkin declared bankruptcy and washed his hands of the vessel, its cargo, and its crew, leaving some of the latter desperately stranded (dummies on the dock?) and sitting on deadly material for over a year, not to mention the subsequent media attention and Interpol red notices. Seems like a pretty dick move.

"... was supposed to have been a stop-over on the itinerary of my ill-fated ocean ferry." (RT 4.3)

In a follow-up debriefing, intel indicates that the port in which the Rhosus docked was intended as a stop-over, not the final destination. That ammonium nitrate was supposed to have gone elsewhere, as confirmed by the captain of the ill-fated vessel in subsequent interviews.

"... completely removing a large section with a slow-motion drift of crunching lumber and hollow metallic groans ... warping of the hull or tearing off of the outside seal ... it looked to me like the ship was beginning to list to one side ... I may have been witnessing the ship's last voyage."

The impounded ship was in bad shape with a growing hole in its hull, causing the vessel to slowly list and eventually sink while docked.

I've omitted some off-line and unconfirmed intel but even without them I think the results are pretty good.

Ops RT 4.3 and later are yielding good results, just not yet good enough.
However, to paraphrase Nicolette (remember her?), now may have been early.

But get this ... multiple Agents have confirmed the existence of the Bodhi tree leaf. We even acquired a lo-res digital of a stubbly "Sam" dressed as a "Buddhist monk". Personally, I didn't buy the elevator shtick for a moment.

Ostensibly the leaf is pressed between the pages of one of the A-O's journals but there's concern that such a brittle item may not have survived after all these years. That's assuming that we even have the notebook. I have a box full of them (and some weird artifacts), to go through in my office - LOL! - so there's still a chance.

There's lots more to tell but my fingers are getting angry at me, so let me just close by saying that it's nice to know I can still depend on the Agency to provide refined shrubbery and superlative java served in a perfect Balinese cup. One of these days I have to show you the carved caffeine cat coffee cup caddy, you'll plotz.

Signing off late at night, or early morning, from somewhere deep within a dank dark corner of downtown Central, P.

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250 OK: queued

QUIT

221 Bye

_ / JOURNAL B - PRIMARY INGRESS \ _

Officially, Section B doesn't exist.



Even the word "officially" is a misdirection. The Section would be quickly dismissed by any actual agency "official", assuming they're one of a handful who'd even heard of it.

Section B is secret even by Transmundane standards. It's so secret that it's usually derided as nothing more than one of either paranoid delusion, youthful folly, or a joke with no punchline.

At best, anyone willing to seriously discuss it would likely regard Section B as an unsubstantiated rumor. But I happen to know for a fact that it's none of these things, and that's because I've been with Section B for a while now.

My earliest, albeit unknowing, contact with the Section must've been when I was around nine. Our entire school took an "IQ" test but for some reason we weren't allowed to know our scores. A few weeks later I was pulled aside in class by the teacher and told that my results were "strange, but not in a bad way".

I was hurriedly shuffled off into a room with about ten or so other kids, also accompanied by their teachers, told that we were going to do a fun test that'd be something like "news reporters", but don't worry because nothing would be graded, and be sure to listen carefully to the instructions!

The teachers left and people with white lab coats and clipboards entered, followed by a few men in black suits, the lab coats' "quiet friends", who would be hanging out at the back of the room and we should ignore them because they were "just here to watch".

We were taken to a couple of tables with a bunch of recording equipment laid out on them: Polaroid land cameras, portable cassette recorders, a couple of impressive new VHS camcorders, a few Super 8s, and some pencils and writing pads. We were told to choose one recording method and then split off into pairs to interview each other. Try to ask interesting questions and do your best to capture the response, they instructed. And we only have a few minutes so don't waste time.

The testers must've given the go signal while I was busy contemplating the task because the electronics were snatched up before I knew what was happening. My hesitation meant that all that was left was a dollar store notepad and the nub of a pencil tipped with a useless plastic eraser that just smudged mistakes around.

It was all very brusque and it took me a while to find someone in the ensuing melee who, like me, looked to have arrived late to the party.

First step accomplished, I took the task to heart and decided to interview my partner in the way that I imagined an old timey, hard drinkin', black and white newspaper man would: by asking tough questions such as what were her favorite color, movie, and meal, all while dutifully jotting down the answers.

She reciprocated with the same questions except this time we were doing the interview into a voice recorder. She'd swapped it for the shoulder-mounted VHS camera she'd originally grabbed because at the time it "seemed neat" but ended up being too bulky and heavy (and, she admitted, she couldn't figure out how to use it).

The people in the lab coats called time at about ten minutes, most of which my partner and me spent chatting "off the record" since we'd quickly run out of inane questions to ask each other. We were then instructed to line up, hand in our equipment, and answer some questions before we were sent back to class.

I remember thinking at the time how odd it was that when I finally got to the end of the line the lab coat lady behind the table took my notepad and pencil and just tossed them into a box with all the other kids' stuff. But I hadn't written my name on it -- how will they know whose work it is?

She said not to worry about it, they have a system, but right now she needed to know more about the interview. Did I know what my partner would say before she said it? Did I get any strange pictures in my mind during our talk? Did I hear any voice in my head that wasn't my own? Could I hear people in the room when they weren't moving their mouths?

I considered each question carefully and in earnest.

Keep in mind that I was a kid; all of these people were in my school with consent and all dressed in lab coats and authoritative black suits. Adults sometimes say and do weird things and this, whatever this was, got me out of math class so I co-operated.

The lady seemed increasingly disappointed with my replies and finally just asked me with half-interest if I'd at least had a good time. I replied that I had, learned all about my partner, where she lived, where she'd emigrated from, what her mom did, where her dad worked (she wasn't usually supposed to tell anyone), how he sometimes got mad when he was drinking, and some other stuff that bothered her. Oh and she also has a dog who she loves and might be sick but I didn't write any of that down because it wasn't part of the interview.

I remember the lady leaning back in her chair with an odd, amused look on her face and saying something like, "really?", then calling over one of the men in black suits. The two of them stood with their backs to me for a few minutes while huddled in hushed conversation.

Eventually he nodded, quickly glanced back over his shoulder at me, and walked away. The lady sat back down and thanked me, then I was shown out.

I never found out if anyone ever read my interview notes, never confirmed exactly what lab coat lady was driving at with those questions, what she and black suit talked about near the end, or what happened to the lot of them afterward.

I would later learn that my partner had moved to an undisclosed new city, basically the next day after our "interview", and me and the other kids in the test group rarely interacted or moved in the same circles, so there was little chance to corroborate. The odd time that we did, no one hinted that it had all seemed a little weird - just a fun, albeit brief, activity some of us got to do one afternoon at school.

I've taken a few subsequent IQ tests but in most respects, it seems, I'm simply a non-achiever; too much slack, I guess. In the end I'm just your average, run-of-the-mill Section B Agent.

I wasn't born in this country - I came from behind the Iron Curtain; full-on Commie. We fled under the cover of a literal dark and stormy night (the "It was a ..." variety), and I can vaguely remember my family being smuggled by some "friends" in the back of an old Renault hatchback to a foggy, steamy railway station; something straight out of a Turner Classic noir. We were there to catch a cross-border train with forged documents.

If everything went well then by sunrise we'd be in West Germany, then Austria where we would go to the nearest embassy to get visas for our new home. Of course I was too young to have a grasp of the consequences if everything didn't go well.

There were the requisite nail-biting moments when the locomotive stopped to let on border guards. With machine guns slung over their shoulders (not the first time I'd encounter military firearms during our exodus), they grumpily scrutinized our papers and eventually relented. I didn't understand why my parents weren't pleased at the outcome. My father explained to me that we weren't in the clear yet; they could just come back with a few buddies to arrest us all.

Tick tock tick tock...

Then the train lurched forward and the tangible ball of apprehension in the cabin exploded into unbridled joy. Kinda corny and cinematic, I know, but sometimes things are kind of like that.

Little did we know that our brief stopover in Austria would turn into a year-long delay while we waited for our visas. During the interlude we were helped out by a local church group and my parents were able to earn some money by working at the inn where we were housed. I learned a smattering of German and

fell in love with the lush green hills and hidden stone ruins that encircled the lonely country hotel.

Because we weren't paying for our lodging with anything other than labour, the owners would move us to unoccupied suites to accommodate paying patrons. Most of the time I welcomed the change to another room but there was one exception on the top floor, a trapezoidal unit containing only a dresser, bedside table, and a small bed, all wedged in under a tall, sloping ceiling/roof which was inset with a broad skylight. It felt as odd as it looked.

This angular room was probably not for customers. It was barely for adults. But it was offered and I thought it was a good way to test my big kid courage so, for everyone's sake, I volunteered to spend a couple of nights there while my parents would sleep in a nearby room and my siblings in a third.

On the second night something came into my room through the skylight.

I couldn't begin to describe the absolute darkest and most opaque blackness that slithered across the ceiling, down the wall, and congealed up from the floor into a humanoid form to loom over me. Two red, burning embers rolled out from the dark murk right about where the eyes should've been and I remember trying to scream but being completely paralyzed. After that I have no memory of what happened until my parents burst into my room saying they'd heard me shrieking for help ... and why is it so cold in here?

Of course, night terrors coupled with sleep paralysis would be perfectly reasonable explanations for what transpired that night - except for two things: one, night terrors don't leave a skylight mysteriously ajar, especially when that skylight requires a long pole to open and close, and that pole is kept behind the hotel reception desk; two, night terrors don't tend to leave behind physical marks (I can still see them in the mirror).

I wouldn't claim the intrusion was a supernatural event or even that my memory of it is entirely accurate, just that *something* or *someone* left behind physical evidence of their presence. Most of my bad dreams leave no trace.

Much later I'm on my first deep cover assignment in a hot, sticky, frenetic city in tropical Southeast Asia. Fresh out of basic training, just another unofficial schlep (i.e. to be 100% disavowed), living in a foreign land; don't speak a lick of the language, can't read it for shit.

Initially I'm supposed to stay for only a few months but I guess I get a little too good at my job and end up living there for nearly four years.

I make a broad variety of contacts during my tenure, many of which strike me as somehow having extricated themselves from the pages of comic books or pulp fiction.

For example, there's Pete the "Redneck Raver" (an honorific given to him by others).

This guy is basically John Rambo. He has the same weather-beaten face that Stallone has, same physique, dressed pretty much the same way, regularly sports Americana on his person, has a collection of scary-looking weapons, and is given to sullen philosophical narratives in which he confesses the dark details of his time in black ops. I have no reason to doubt the sincerity of his remorse or that, if he wants to, he could kill me with his bare hands.

Doing hard drugs with this guy adds another layer of thrill on top of one provided by a country that regularly reminds you that they kill people for possession. At one point I'm grilled by the authorities while another contact disappears into a detention facility and we both agree that we didn't enjoy ourselves.

If you have a good tolerance, though, drugs can be immensely helpful in Agency work and mine come courtesy of another personality.

Eric the Hippie is every possible sixties cliché rolled into one: unwashed tie-dye t-shirt, dirty tattered bell-bottoms, long greasy hair, blackened bare feet, regularly munching on granola, and constantly on LSD.

The way he flashes a peace sign while saying, "groovy, man", in that slow stereotypical hippie drawl just makes you want to punch that vacuous smile right into his face. Unfortunately he's often the only one holding so you just have to bottle it up, for now.

But in time, karma comes riding into town with a boner.

Seems Eric and one of his friends are taking their morning constitutional on one of the many lush forest trails that meander through the humid foothills; high on acid, of course. For some reason they get on the topic of how they would respond if they were to be raped by an animal. Imagine this guy at parties.

Apparently Eric believes that he would be understanding enough to let the beast finish. After all, if it needed to get off that much then the only humane thing to do is to let it climax. It's like, love, man.

Before Eric's friend has a chance to add his penny's worth they're interrupted by a rustling in the bushes nearby.

As they approach, a giant orange shape bursts out and past them, shoots up a nearby tree, and sits down on a sturdy branch to observe them. It's an Orangutan which, although this is a tropical jungle, is nevertheless about as indigenous to here as it is to New York City.

Because Eric & Co. are the embodiment of the high-caliber intellect, they decide to pick up a couple of sticks to see if they can taunt the large ape out of the tree. What the fuck the endgame is here is anybody's guess.

As could be reasonably expected, the Orangutan puts up with this for slightly less than one steaming second before it launches itself at the two idiots. Eric's friend gets grabbed and tossed away like a rag doll while Eric is dragged away by his arm.

The Orangutan then pulls Eric to a more private spot nearby, grabs him by the waist, and buries its nose in his navel. Apparently deciding that his brand of funk is just what the doctor ordered, the ape begins to rip Eric's clothes off.

Luckily for Eric his friend has recovered and is shouting for help. Hearing this, some of the elderly regulars on the trail veer off their morning hike to assist.

Now the old folks are beating the Orangutan, sometimes accidentally Eric, with sticks and stones and anything else they have on hand - but the orange hulk remains too focused on its task. It's only when a geriatric somehow, from somewhere, gets a jar of hot tar and smashes it over Orangutan's head that the great ape lets go and dashes off into the jungle.

The old people help Eric and his friend to their feet, gather up their belongings, and offer to take them to a hospital. Both Eric and his friend refuse and limp off.

There is no record of any conversation during their journey.

Eric then shows up on the doorstep of two other hippie contacts. He's more naked than usual, bruised, bloodied, and covered in tar, so they're naturally incredulous. "Yeah, sure," they later tell me, "Eric drops a bunch of acid, goes for a walk in the jungle, and gets 'raped by an ape' until a group of old people attack him - I'm, like, dude ..."

The next day a local paper runs an unusual story. The numerous witnesses all tell pretty much the same tale and it matches the details of Eric's own. It seems that an ape had escaped from someone's illegal private zoo, "indecently assaulted" a couple of foreigners walking on a hiking trail, and was now at large in the forest.

Ah, the sweet recollections of the Section.